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Mahathir-interview

MAHATHIR HITS OUT AT EUROPE AND U.S. FOR INACTION ON BOSNIA

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 8 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister ⁹³ Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has criticised European nations for coming out with "very depressing" responses to the conflict in Bosnia Herzegovina. ⁸

He said the Europeans had been talking so much about justice, fair play and human rights but yet allowed the atrocities in Bosnia to happen and all this had made him to "partially lose" faith in the good values of the West.

"For people who talk so much about justice, fair play, human rights, freedom and all that. These are the people who've been talking all the time -- who don't think we're democratic enough for them. I had always believed the West would not let these things happen. But now I have partially lost my faith in the good values of the West," Dr Mahathir said in an interview with Asiaweek magazine.

In the interview, Dr Mahathir left no doubt about his commitment to trying to end the carnage in Bosnia.

In his view, the ideal solution to the conflict is to give back Bosnia to the Bosnians -- whether they are Croats, Serbs or Muslims and to let them be sovereign.

Dr Mahathir is equally critical of the U.S. inaction in Bosnia, saying: "The U.S. has said it's willing to participate. But the Europeans are telling the U.S. not to. For the life of me, I can't understand why the U.S. is so subservient, considering it used to do things on its own; Grenada, Nicaragua."--more

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Rptng, changing "Newsweek" to "Asiaweek" in first para.

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Following is the interview with Asiaweek Senior Correspondent Roger Mitton:

What is Malaysia's interest in Bosnia?

It's the feeling that Bosnians have been unfairly oppressed that motivates us. That they are Muslims is of added interest. But the Bosnians are not all Muslims. There are Christians, if we can do something about it we should.

The Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) would help the U.N. protect Muslim enclaves?

We have to give the Bosnians a territory that they can call Bosnia. They have a right. It's a country recognised by the U.N. being gobbled up by the Serbs. And all the U.N. can do is to say: we don't want to hurt our soldiers because at home this might not be acceptable.

Would Malaysian forces take an offensive role?

If the U.N. expects us to take an offensive role, we'll have to. If we're a part of that U.N. enforcement force, we'll do it. We're not going as an independent Malaysian force.

If Iran and the Palestinians aren't allowed to go, will you send troops?

We'd be supportive. There are those who are favourable towards the Serbs. We've never protested if they participate. Why should there be discrimination against the Iranians? We don't want to think of this as a kind of holy war. But if the Iranians want to contribute troops they should be allowed to. -- more

end of rptn

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Some say Iran has a record of backing radical groups.

Western countries have a record of supporting insurgencies.

The idea of a Muslim force in Europe disturbs many.

We're not saying it should be a totally Muslim force. But the Europeans aren't willing to face the risks. We'd be happy to stay out of this, if the Europeans would take the kind of action they took against Iraq. We'd like to save our people from going there.

Do the Europeans have a right to say who can send troops?

No. The only body that does is the U.N. General Assembly.

Not the Security Council?

The Security Council we find dominated by certain groups.

There is solid support in the OIC to send troops?

There is. Of course, they're aware of the danger and unless they're fully equipped and well-protected, I don't think they're going to take risks. We (Malaysia) are not going to send in our troops to be slaughtered. We need the equipment to deal with the Serbs. We need air cover and all that. If the Serbs start shooting at us, we have to reply in kind. So we need a proper force capable of dealing with that kind of situation.--more

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Jakarta hasn't committed troops.

The Indonesians may participate with troops. I think they would (although) they haven't said so.

Do you have public support at home to send troops?

Yes. There have been strong feelings. Everybody is aware of the risks. They're going to send their husbands and children. Obviously, they're concerned. But they feel strongly about this.

Will Muslim troops be neutral?

If you're shot at and then you say: "sorry, I don't mind being shot at because I am neutral, it's crazy. If you are shot at, I think you have to shoot back. Even Western troops don't like to be shot at.

Some fear they may supply arms to their fellow Muslims.

We think the Bosnians should be fighting for themselves. I can't understand why the Bosnians are denied arms. If I am beaten by a thug and the policeman says, "I will not allow you to have any weapons to beat the thug because then you will be hurt and the thug will be hurt also. If we have that kind of logic the world must be going crazy.

Should the OIC openly defy the embargo?

No. But we'd back the U.N. to make a decision to allow the Bosnians to have arms. The Serbs have not been denied arms.--more

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Western forces say they'd leave if the embargo went.

Because they want to save their skin. Why didn't they leave when they had to fight the Iraqis? Because they can get away with it. And yet the Iraqis haven't been as oppressive as the Serbs.

Would OIC troops focus on the Muslim community?

No, the Bosnians as a whole. The Muslim community there have always been saying they don't want Bosnia for themselves alone. They want to share it with the Croats and the Serbs. They want to live together the way they lived before. But they are being forced to have separate enclaves. That's not what they wish.

But Muslims are the ones bearing the brunt of atrocities.

The U.N. and the West say they must have a right after the Gulf War to go into any country to see that justice is done. Now here is a blatant case which you see every day on TV and you say: "We can't do anything". What kind of a policeman are you?

How do you assess the various European responses?

Very depressing -- for people who talk so much about justice, fair play, human rights, freedom and all that. These are the people who've been talking all the time -- who don't think we're democratic enough for them. I had always believed the West would not let these kinds of things happen. But now, I have partially lost my faith in the good values of the West.

How about the U.S. response?

The U.S. has said it's willing to participate. But the Europeans are telling the U.S. not to. For the life of me I can't understand why the U.S. is so subservient, considering it used to do things on its own. Grenada, Nicaragua.

What are the implications of the West's response?

If the Serbs get away with this, they're going to do other things. Other countries might have the same ideas -- that if you're willing to bash Western forces, you can get away with murder. --more

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What is ideal solution?

Give back Bosnia to the Bosnians. Whether they are Croats, Serbs or Muslims, let them (be) sovereign.

If Slobodan Milosevic were here, what would you say to him?

I would bash him in the face. I can't understand how the world can allow this maniac, this murderer to get away with everything.

You equate him with Hitler?

Yes. He and Radovan Karadzic.

Milosevic may argue that he's defending Serbian rights.

The Bosnians are defending theirs. But you're being like an animal. You go around raping people, murdering women and children. People are operated without anaesthetic, and children are cut up because there's no medicine. Every day you see it on TV. You sit in your comfortable chair and watch people being murdered. And you do nothing about it. And you talk about modern civilisation. New World Order.

It's said the Muslim world didn't act decisively either.

Yes, we're handicapped. The Muslim world is not one homogenous group. We fight against one another also. We're not capable of acting. But then we've never posed as the world's policeman. We've never tried to impose our values on other people.

Don't you have an obligation to defend fellow Muslims?

Yes. But within our means. We've no capacity to put into effect any action. We're weak. There's no Muslim superpower.--more

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Will radical Muslim elements gain ground as a result of the Bosnian situation?

Frustration among other Palestinians led to irresponsible action, like terrorism. They're trying to get back on track, but are not getting any response. When people become frustrated with the system, they'll resort to other means. Even non-Muslims. Everyday Jews kill Muslims. Nobody reacts. Everyday Christians kill other Christians. Nobody reacts. Nobody says this is a Christian movement. Why is it that (when) some groups of extremists do something, the whole Muslim religion is condemned?

How has the U.N. performed as far as Malaysia is concerned?

In Cambodia we've played a big role. The problem is more or less resolved. We don't see a solution to the Somali problem yet, but we're willing to participate. We see a reluctance in Bosnia.

Should the Security Council include other nations?

The Charter should be amended. The world can't be tied to the results of the war 45 years ago. We must think of a modern world. The permanent five -- we don't mind their being permanent but no veto power. We think other people should be permanent. Developing countries should have representatives permanently.

Japan?

I hope Japan will show an interest in the rest of the world and not just limited interest. If it does, it deserves to be on the Security Council.

Which major powers is Malaysia comfortable with?

We're not comfortable with anyone. We used to be comfortable with some.

China?

China has not played the role we hoped it would. But it has its own problems. On the other hand, it has not been going around waving the flag, telling people what to do and what not to do, your democracy is not democratic enough. The BBC recently said we are an oppressive authoritarian society. Our people are being oppressed. Come on. We don't mind with 8 % growth.

Does the U.S. have a role in the region?

If the U.S. wants a role, it must show fairness elsewhere. The U.S. is saying we are threatened by China. But I don't see the threat from China as being any worse than the threat from the U.S. It's fine if you don't do anything the U.S. doesn't like, but if you happen to cross them, you can end up badly off.

You don't subscribe to its role as power balancer?

There's no such thing. The neutrality of the region should be respected. Everybody should get out.

Will the East Asian Economic Caucus have a summit before the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum meets in Seattle?

No. I think we'll have to discuss how to structure EAEC. We're not dictating to the rest what form EAEC should take. It should be by consultation. We're not in a hurry. --Bernama

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